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Viewing cable 09ISTANBUL352, IRAN: REGIME PRESSURE REACHING SOME ISTANBUL

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#09ISTANBUL352**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09ISTANBUL352	2009-09-15 09:52	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET	Consulate Istanbul

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/04/17/112290/state-department-cables-reveal.html>

VZCZCXRO5656

PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDIR RUEHKUK RUEHTRO

DE RUEHIT #0352/01 2580952

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FM AMCONSUL ISTANBUL

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9187

INFO RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000352

SIPDIS

LONDON FOR MURRAY; BERLIN FOR ROSENSTOCK-STILLER; BAKU FOR MCCRENSKY; ASHGABAT FOR TANGBORN; BAGHDAD FOR POPAL; DUBAI FOR IRPO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/14/2034

TAGS: [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [IR](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: IRAN: REGIME PRESSURE REACHING SOME ISTANBUL CONTACTS

REF: (A) ISTANBUL 47 (B) ISTANBUL 94 (C) ISTANBUL 138

(D) ISTANBUL 189 (E) ISTANBUL 207 (F)

ISTANBUL 244 (G) ISTANBUL 290

Classified By: ConGen Istanbul Deputy Principal Officer Win Dayton; Rea

son 1.5 (d).

¶1. (S) Several Istanbul-based contacts of ConGen Istanbul's NEA Iran Watcher have separately cautioned us in the past week that they been asked (or warned) by Iranian officials to cease contact with "American diplomats asking questions about Iran." In one case, a key contact -- XXXXXXXXXXXX-- is returning temporarily to Iran to "clear everything up." Comment: A number of State Iran-Watchers' Iran-based contacts have suffered harassment, intimidation, and detention since the post-election crackdown. Reporting from IRPO Dubai and others underscores the likelihood that regime pressure on Iranians with U.S. or western links will only worsen. These recent warnings to our Istanbul-based contacts, however, may represent a new element in this campaign of intimidation, and reconfirms that the regime pays attention to our outreach efforts outside Iran. In response, we will take additional steps to protect local contacts and stay vigilant against regime efforts to track our interactions with them, while redoubling efforts to expand the range of Turkey-based contacts willing to share Iran-related insights. End comment.

¶2. (S) In the past week, we heard separately from three valuable Istanbul-based contacts that they each received recent requests or warnings from Iranian officials to limit or cease contacts with American diplomats in Istanbul.

¶3. XXXXXXXXXXXX

¶4. (S) A UK national who has worked as the Istanbul correspondent for Iran's satellite news channel "Press TV" since summer 2007 and has been willing to share insights into Press TV and Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) editorial and press operations (ref d), told us that her Tehran-based editor warned her last week to stop having contact with "any American diplomats there asking about Iran." She speculated that Iranian consulate officials in Istanbul may have seen her talking to ConGen Istanbul's Iran Watcher at any number of recent functions and, as they are presumably aware of ConGen Istanbul Iran Watcher's portfolio, they may have sent word back to Press TV management to warn her off of such contacts. She told us her response to her editor was that as a journalist her job is to gather information from all informed sources in Istanbul including diplomats, and that any contact she has with U.S. or other diplomats in Istanbul is strictly in support of her own reporting. She told us that because she is a UK citizen and living in Turkey, and considers herself one of Press TV's best international correspondents, she is not afraid of pressure from Press TV management since "the worst they can do is fire me, which they won't." (Comment: In an incident that may or may not have been related, but that this contact found suspicious, her apartment was broken into on June 26 and her laptop was stolen, though her purse, jewelry, and other valuables were left alone.) She expressed a willingness to continue occasional contacts with us, though

ISTANBUL 00000352 002 OF 002

we agreed not to have contacts at conferences or other fora where Iranian consulate officials might be present.

¶5. (S) We recently contacted the coordinator for the Turkish-Iran Business Council (ref b), responsible for setting up the TIBC's frequent meetings and trade fairs with Iranian counterparts. He is a Turkish national who has been a helpful contact since late 2007. We contacted him to request a meeting with the TIBC to discuss recent developments in Turkish-Iranian commercial relations, in advance of a biannual "Turkish-Iranian Business Council Forum" next month in Tehran and Mashhad. Our contact told us by email that two members of the TIBC's executive board were queried by "Iranian acquaintances of theirs" (NFI) at a Ramadan Iftar dinner ceremony at the Iranian Ambassador to Turkey's residence last week about the TIBC's contacts with the US Consulate in Istanbul, including what specific questions we have asked the TIBC about Iran-Turkey commerce.

Our contact did not know how the Iranian Embassy was aware of the TIBC's occasional meetings with us. (Comment: We have met about six times with TIBC executive board members, including a November 2008 courtesy call on the board by NEA/IR's Office Director; additionally, ConGen Istanbul's Iran Watcher has met numerous times socially with this contact, usually for coffee at a local cafe. End comment.) He said a TIBC board member told him they brushed aside the Iranian queries, but they also cautioned him that the TIBC needs to be more careful in ensuring that its Iranian partners are not given a reason "to doubt our commitment to expanding bilateral commerce while staying out of politics." This contact pledged to try to help set up a meeting for us with the TIBC executive board, but declined an offer to meet socially in the near-term.

Comment

16. (S) Comment: A number of State Department "Iran Watchers" and others have seen both professional contacts and friends in Iran suffer harassment, intimidation and in many cases detention and worse, especially following the recent, post-election crackdown on Mousavi supporters and others activists. Reporting from IRPO Dubai and elsewhere underscores the likelihood that the regime will only intensify the crackdown against Iranians who have U.S. and western contacts. However, these recent warnings to our Istanbul-based contacts may represent a new element in this campaign of intimidation. These examples are a clear indication that the Iranian regime is aware of at least some of our Istanbul-based contacts' interactions with us, and willing to use varying degrees of pressure -- even against non-Iranians over whom it has some leverage -- to try or limit to stop further contact with us. (Overt Iranian physical intimidation against contacts in Turkey, however, is unlikely, as it would cross a red-line not crossed since the GOT expelled then-Iranian Ambassador Mottaki -- now Iran's Foreign Minister -- in 1989 for playing a likely role in the kidnapping and/or assassination of several dozen Iranian dissidents in Turkey in the mid and late 1980s.)

17. (S) Engaging with Iran-related contacts, even in Turkey, has always been a sensitive undertaking, but now it is becoming even more so. In response, we make every effort to try to protect our local contacts, take additional measures to ensure confidentiality in our meetings with them, and remain vigilant against Iranian efforts to track our interactions with them. But we will also redouble efforts to maintain, and even expand, the range of contacts in Turkey willing to brave such threats to share valuable insights with us. End comment.

WIENER